

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
Alexandria Division



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

No. 1:19-cr-334

TAO LIU,

Defendant.

PLEA AGREEMENT

Raj Parekh, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; undersigned counsel for the United States; the defendant, Tao Liu; and the defendant's counsel have entered into an agreement pursuant to Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure. The terms of this Plea Agreement are as follows:

1. Offense and Maximum Penalties

The defendant agrees to plead guilty to Counts Three and Eight of the Superseding Indictment. Count Three charges the defendant with conspiracy to commit money laundering, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h). The maximum penalties for this offense are: a maximum term of 20 years of imprisonment, a fine of \$500,000 or twice the value of the funds involved in the offense, whichever is greater, forfeiture of assets as outlined below, a special assessment pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3013, and a maximum supervised release term of 3 years. Count Eight charges the defendant with bribery of a public official, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(1).

The maximum penalties for this offense are: a maximum term of 15 years of imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000 or not more than three times the monetary equivalent of the thing of value involved in the offense, whichever is greater, forfeiture of assets as outlined below, a special assessment pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3013, and a maximum supervised release term of 3 years.

Furthermore, conviction for Count Eight may disqualify the defendant from holding any office of honor, trust, or profit under the United States. The defendant understands that any supervised release term is in addition to any prison term the defendant may receive, and that a violation of a term of supervised release could result in the defendant being returned to prison for the full term of supervised release.

2. Factual Basis for the Plea

The defendant will plead guilty because the defendant is in fact guilty of the charged offenses. The defendant admits the facts set forth in the Statement of Facts filed with this Plea Agreement and agrees that those facts establish guilt of the offenses charged beyond a reasonable doubt. The Statement of Facts, which is hereby incorporated into this Plea Agreement, constitutes a stipulation of facts for purposes of Section 1B1.2(c) of the Sentencing Guidelines.

3. Assistance and Advice of Counsel

The defendant is satisfied that the defendant's attorney has rendered effective assistance. The defendant understands that by entering into this Plea Agreement, defendant surrenders certain rights as provided in this agreement. The defendant understands that the rights of criminal defendants include the following:

- a. the right to plead not guilty and to persist in that plea;
- b. the right to a jury trial;
- c. the right to be represented by counsel—and, if necessary, have the court appoint counsel—at trial and at every other stage of the proceedings; and
- d. the right at trial to confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses, to be protected from compelled self-incrimination, to testify and present evidence, and to compel the attendance of witnesses.

4. Sentencing Guidelines, Recommendations, and Roles

The defendant understands that the Court has jurisdiction and authority to impose any sentence within the statutory maximum described above, but that the Court will determine the defendant's actual sentence in accordance with 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a). The defendant understands that the Court has not yet determined a sentence and that any estimate of the advisory sentencing range under the U.S. Sentencing Commission's Sentencing Guidelines Manual the defendant may have received from the defendant's counsel, the United States, or the Probation Office, is a prediction, not a promise, and is not binding on the United States, the Probation Office, or the Court. Additionally, pursuant to the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005), the Court, after considering the factors set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a), may impose a sentence above or below the advisory sentencing range, subject only to review by higher courts for reasonableness. The United States makes no promise or representation concerning what sentence the defendant will receive, and the defendant cannot withdraw a guilty plea based upon the actual sentence.

Further, in accordance with Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11(c)(1)(B), the United States and the defendant stipulate and will recommend to the Court that the following provisions of the Sentencing Guidelines apply:

Guideline(s)	Description	Offense Level
2S1.1(a)(2)	Base offense level (with respect to Count Three)	8
2S1.1(a)(2) and 2B1.1(b)(1)(H)	Loss amount in excess of \$550,000	+14
2S1.1(b)(1)	Defendant knew or believed the laundered funds were the proceeds of the distribution or importation of a controlled substance	+6
2S1.1(b)(2)(B)	The defendant was convicted under 18 U.S.C. § 1956	+2
2S1.1(b)(3)	The offense involved sophisticated means	+2
2C1.1(a)(2)	Base offense level (with respect to Count Eight)	12

2C1.1(a)(2) and 2B1.1(b)(1)(G)	Loss amount in excess of \$250,000	+12
2C1.1(b)(1)	Offense involved more than one bribe	+2

The United States and the defendant further agree that the defendant has assisted the government in the investigation and prosecution of the defendant's own misconduct by timely notifying authorities of the defendant's intention to enter a plea of guilty, thereby permitting the government to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the government and the Court to allocate their resources efficiently. If the defendant qualifies for a two-level decrease in offense level pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 3E1.1(a) and the offense level prior to the operation of that section is a level 16 or greater, the government agrees to file, pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 3E1.1(b), a motion prior to, or at the time of, sentencing for an additional one-level decrease in the defendant's offense level.

The United States and the defendant have not agreed on any further sentencing issues, whether related to the Sentencing Guidelines or the factors listed in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a), other than those set forth above or elsewhere in this Plea Agreement. Any stipulation on a Guidelines provision does not limit the parties' arguments as to any other Guidelines provisions or sentencing factors under Section 3553(a), including arguments for a sentence within or outside the advisory Guidelines range found by the Court at sentencing.

5. Waiver of Appeal, FOIA, and Privacy Act Rights

The defendant also understands that 18 U.S.C. § 3742 affords a defendant the right to appeal the sentence imposed. Nonetheless, the defendant knowingly waives the right to appeal the conviction and any sentence within the statutory maximum described above (or the manner in which that sentence was determined) on the grounds set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3742 or on any

ground whatsoever other than an ineffective assistance of counsel claim that is cognizable on direct appeal, in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this Plea Agreement. This agreement does not affect the rights or obligations of the United States as set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b). The defendant also hereby waives all rights, whether asserted directly or by a representative, to request or receive from any department or agency of the United States any records pertaining to the investigation or prosecution of this case, including without limitation any records that may be sought under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, or the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

6. Immunity from Further Prosecution in This District

The United States will not further criminally prosecute the defendant in the Eastern District of Virginia for the specific conduct described in the Superseding Indictment or Statement of Facts. This Plea Agreement and Statement of Facts does not confer on the defendant any immunity from prosecution by any state government in the United States.

7. Dismissal of Other Counts

As a condition of the execution of this agreement and the Court's acceptance of the defendant's plea of guilty, the United States will move to dismiss the remaining counts pending against this defendant at the conclusion of this defendant's sentencing hearing.

8. Payment of Monetary Penalties

The defendant understands and agrees that, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3613 and 18 U.S.C. § 3572, all monetary penalties imposed by the Court, including restitution, will be due immediately and subject to immediate enforcement by the United States as provided for in Section 3613. Within 14 days of a request, the defendant agrees to provide all of the defendant's financial information to the United States and the Probation Office and, if requested, to

participate in a pre-sentencing debtor's examination and/or complete a financial statement under penalty of perjury. If the Court imposes a schedule of payments, the defendant understands that the schedule of payments is merely a minimum schedule of payments and not the only method, nor a limitation on the methods, available to the United States to enforce the judgment. Until all monetary penalties are paid in full, the defendant will be referred to the Treasury Offset Program so that any federal payment or transfer of returned property to the defendant will be offset and applied to pay the defendant's unpaid monetary penalties. If the defendant is incarcerated, the defendant agrees to participate voluntarily in the Bureau of Prisons' Inmate Financial Responsibility Program, regardless of whether the Court specifically directs participation or imposes a schedule of payments. Defendant agrees to make good-faith efforts toward payment of all monetary penalties imposed by the Court.

9. Special Assessment

Before sentencing in this case, the defendant agrees to pay a mandatory special assessment of \$100 per felony count of conviction, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3013(a)(2)(A).

10. Forfeiture Generally

This Plea Agreement is being entered into by the United States on the basis of Defendant's express representation that he will make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which he exercises or exercised direct or indirect control, or in which he has and any financial interest since 2008. Defendant agrees not to dispose of any assets or take any action that would affect a transfer of property in which he has an interest, unless Defendant obtains the prior written permission of the United States.

Defendant agrees to make complete financial disclosure by truthfully executing a sworn financial statement (Form OBD-500 or similar form) within 14 days of signing this plea

agreement. Defendant agrees to authorize the release of all financial information requested by the United States, including, but not limited to, executing authorization forms permitting the United States to obtain tax information, bank account records, credit histories, and social security information dating back to 2008. The defendant agrees to take all steps as requested by the United States to obtain from any other parties by any lawful means any records of assets owned at any time by the defendant. Defendant agrees to discuss and answer any questions by the United States relating to defendant's complete financial disclosure. The defendant agrees to undergo any polygraph examination the United States may choose to administer concerning his assets.

Defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States and to assist fully in the collection of restitution and fines, including, but not limited to, surrendering title, executing a warranty deed, signing a consent decree, stipulating to facts regarding the transfer of title and the basis for the forfeiture, and signing any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfer. Defendant also agrees to direct any banks which have custody of his assets to deliver all funds and records of such assets to the United States.

The defendant understands that forfeiture of defendant's assets shall not be treated as satisfaction of any fine, restitution, cost of imprisonment, or any other penalty this Court may impose upon defendant in addition to forfeiture. The defendant understands that the proceeds of the offense are subject to forfeiture and cannot be used for any purpose, to include attorney's fees and living expenses.

11. Forfeiture Agreement

The defendant understands that the forfeiture of assets is part of the sentence that must be imposed in this case. The defendant agrees to forfeit all interests in any money laundering-related or bribery-related assets that the defendant owns or over which the defendant exercises control, directly or indirectly. This includes any property that is traceable to, derived from, fungible with, or a substitute that constitutes the proceeds of the bribery offense as well as any property used or otherwise involved in the money laundering offense.

The defendant understands that if the assets subject to forfeiture are not available to the United States to be forfeited, the Court must enter a forfeiture money judgment in the amount of the unavailable assets. *United States v. Blackman*, 746 F.3d 137 (4th Cir. 2014).

The assets subject to forfeiture include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. A monetary judgment in the amount of not less than \$5,000 USD plus \$9,500 USDT, representing the sum involved in Count Three;
- b. \$1000 USDT (approximately \$995 USD) provided by TAO on June 7, 2020;
- c. \$4000 USDT (approximately \$3981 USD) provided by TAO on June 11, 2020;
- d. \$3000 USD provided by TAO on July 5, 2020;
- e. \$2000 USD provided by TAO on July 6, 2020; and
- f. \$4500 USDT (approximately \$4,488 USD) provided by TAO on October 10, 2020.

The defendant agrees that the sums involved in Count Three, as noted in (a) in the list just above, are not available for forfeiture due to his act or omission. The defendant therefore agrees that the prerequisites of 21 U.S.C. § 853(p)(1) are satisfied and that the government may seek forfeiture of substitute assets in this case.

The defendant further agrees to waive all interest in the asset(s) in any administrative or judicial forfeiture proceeding, whether criminal or civil, state or federal. The defendant agrees to consent to the entry of orders of forfeiture for such property and waives the requirements of Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure 32.2 and 43(a) regarding notice of the forfeiture in the charging instrument, announcement of the forfeiture at sentencing, and incorporation of the forfeiture in the judgment. Defendant admits and agrees that the conduct described in the charging instrument and Statement of Facts provides a sufficient factual and statutory basis for the forfeiture of the property sought by the government.

12. Waiver of Further Review of Forfeiture

The defendant further agrees to waive all constitutional and statutory challenges to forfeiture in any manner (including direct appeal, habeas corpus, or any other means) to any forfeiture carried out in accordance with this Plea Agreement on any grounds, including that the forfeiture constitutes an excessive fine or punishment. The defendant also waives any failure by the Court to advise the defendant of any applicable forfeiture at the time the guilty plea is accepted as required by Rule 11(b)(1)(J). The defendant agrees to take all steps as requested by the United States to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States, and to testify truthfully in any judicial forfeiture proceeding. The defendant understands and agrees that all property covered by this agreement is subject to forfeiture as proceeds of the offenses and property used or otherwise involved in the offenses.

13. Impact of Guilty Plea on Immigration or Citizenship Status

The defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences for defendant's immigration status, if defendant is not a citizen of the United States, or for defendant's citizenship status, if defendant is a naturalized citizen. Under federal law, a broad range of

crimes are removable offenses, including offenses that qualify as aggravated felonies, crimes involving moral turpitude, and conduct involving controlled substances and firearms, among many other categories of criminal activity. Indeed, if defendant is not a citizen of the United States, defendant's guilty plea to and conviction for Count Three make it such that removal is presumptively mandatory. Likewise, if defendant is a naturalized citizen, defendant acknowledges that certain convictions, which may include defendant's conviction, may expose defendant to denaturalization under federal law. Because removal, denaturalization, and other immigration consequences are the subjects of a separate proceeding, defendant understands that no one, including defendant's attorney, the U.S. Attorney's Office, or the U.S. District Court, can predict to a certainty the effect of defendant's conviction on defendant's immigration or citizenship status. Defendant nevertheless affirms that defendant knowingly and voluntarily agrees to plead guilty regardless of any present or future immigration consequences that defendant's plea may entail, even if the consequence is defendant's automatic removal from the United States or denaturalization followed by automatic removal from the United States.

14. Breach of the Plea Agreement and Remedies

This Plea Agreement is effective when signed by the defendant, the defendant's attorney, and an attorney for the United States. The defendant agrees to entry of this Plea Agreement at the date and time scheduled with the Court by the United States (in consultation with the defendant's attorney). If the defendant withdraws from this agreement, or commits or attempts to commit any additional federal, state, or local crimes, or intentionally gives materially false, incomplete, or misleading testimony or information, or otherwise violates any provision of this agreement, then:

- a. The United States will be released from its obligations under this agreement. The defendant, however, may not withdraw the guilty plea entered pursuant to this agreement.
- b. The defendant will be subject to prosecution for any federal criminal violation, including, but not limited to, perjury and obstruction of justice, that is not time-barred by the applicable statute of limitations on the date this agreement is signed. Notwithstanding the subsequent expiration of the statute of limitations, in any such prosecution, the defendant agrees to waive any statute-of-limitations defense.
- c. Any prosecution, including the prosecution that is the subject of this agreement, may be premised upon any information provided, or statements made, by the defendant, and all such information, statements, and leads derived therefrom may be used against the defendant. The defendant waives any right to claim that statements made before or after the date of this agreement, including the Statement of Facts accompanying this agreement or adopted by the defendant and any other statements made pursuant to this or any other agreement with the United States, should be excluded or suppressed under Fed. R. Evid. 410, Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(f), the Sentencing Guidelines, or any other provision of the Constitution or federal law.

Any alleged breach of this agreement by either party shall be determined by the Court in an appropriate proceeding at which the defendant's disclosures and documentary evidence shall be admissible and at which the moving party shall be required to establish a breach of this Plea Agreement by a preponderance of the evidence.

15. Nature of the Agreement and Modifications

This written agreement constitutes the complete plea agreement between the United States, the defendant, and the defendant's counsel. The defendant and the defendant's attorney acknowledge that no threats, promises, or representations have been made, nor agreements reached, other than those set forth in writing in this Plea Agreement or any associated documents filed with the Court, to cause the defendant to plead guilty. Any modification of this Plea

Agreement shall be valid only as set forth in writing in a supplemental or revised plea agreement signed by all parties.

Raj Parekh
Acting United States Attorney

By: 

David A. Peters
Michael P. Ben'Ary
Assistant United States Attorneys

Deborah Connor
Chief, Money Laundering and Asset Recovery
Section, U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal
Division


Kerry Blackburn
Mary Daly
Trial Attorneys

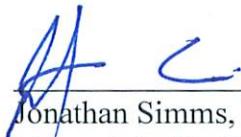
Defendant's Signature: I hereby agree that I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all rights with respect to the pending criminal Superseding Indictment. Further, I fully understand all rights with respect to 18 U.S.C. § 3553 and the provisions of the Sentencing Guidelines Manual that may apply in my case. I have read this Plea Agreement and carefully reviewed every part of it with my attorney. I understand this agreement and voluntarily agree to it.

Date: 4/17/21


Tao Liu

Defense Counsel's Signature: I am counsel for the defendant in this case. I have fully explained to the defendant the defendant's rights with respect to the pending Superseding Indictment. Further, I have reviewed 18 U.S.C. § 3553 and the Sentencing Guidelines Manual, and I have fully explained to the defendant the provisions that may apply in this case. I have carefully reviewed every part of this Plea Agreement with the defendant. To my knowledge, the defendant's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one.

Date: 4/17/21


Jonathan Simms, Esq.
Counsel for the Defendant